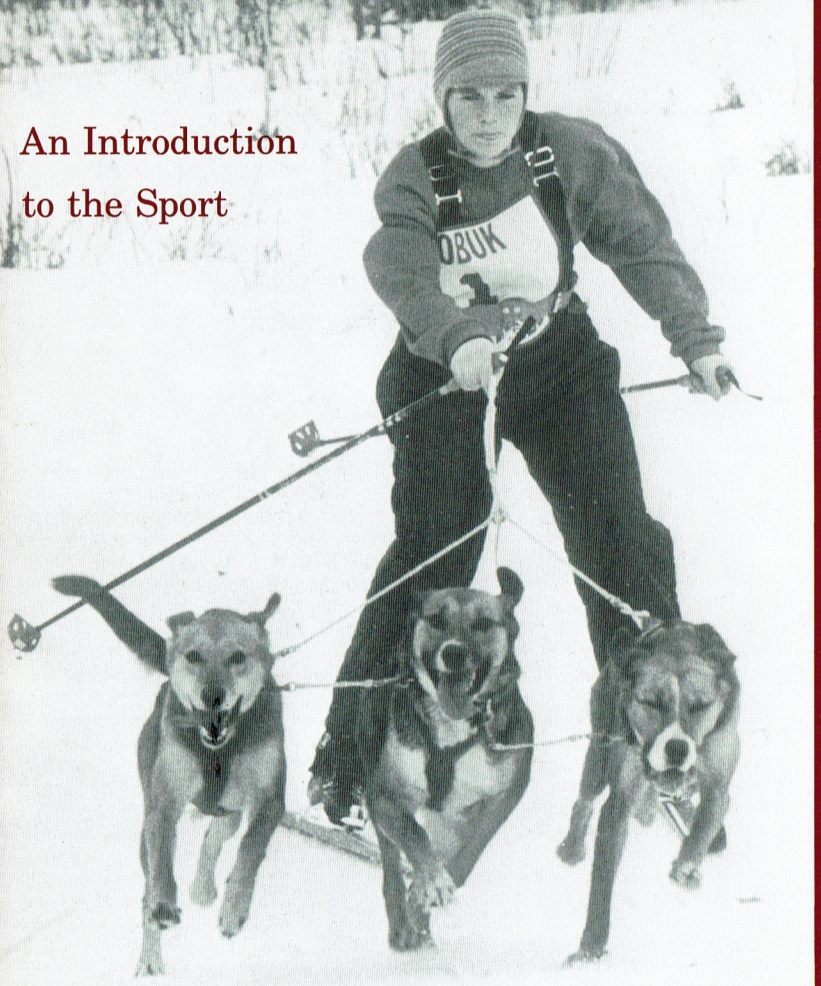
Skijoring



An Introduction
to the Sport

by
Carol Kaynor &
Mari Hoe-Raitto

$5.95 (U.S.)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Carol Kaynor grew up in New England and moved to Fairbanks, Alaska, in 1977. She learned to skijor during her first winter in Alaska and immediately fell in love with the sport. Carol entered her first skijoring race in 1984. Since then, she has helped to organize and promote numerous skijoring clinics and races. Though not destined for greatness as a competitive skijorer, Carol maintains a modest kennel of seven sled dogs and continues to enter skijoring races for the fun of it.

Mari Hoe-Raitto was born in Norway and began entering Nordic-style dog mushing competitions there at the age of 14. She raced successfully for six years in Norway, winning a Nordic sprint championship for northern breeds and placing in the top five in a few longer races. Mari came to the United States in 1980 and began her Alaskan-style dog mushing career in 1982 by entering races in the three-dog class in southcentral Alaska. She has been a top contender in both mushing and skijoring races ever since. Mari holds a bachelor's degree in physical education from the University of Alaska-Fairbanks and has taught cross country skiing and skijoring in both Norway and the United States. Mari and her husband, Dale Raitto, own a 60-dog racing kennel in Salcha, Alaska.

Carol and Mari first met in 1985 to organize a skijoring exhibition, and they have been working together to promote the sport ever since. They co-founded the Alaska Skijoring and Pulk Association (ASPA) in April 1987 and serve on its board of trustees. Carol and Mari have also served on the board of governors of the Alaska Dog Mushers' Association (ADMA) and were instrumental in persuading that club to incorporate a skijoring class into its regular race schedule.

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Carol Kaynor
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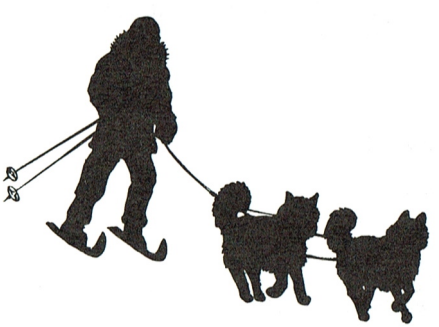

Designed and produced by Polly Walter.
Printing by Dragon Press, Delta, Alaska.

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Published by:

Carol Kaynor & Mari Hoe-Raitto
P.O. Box 82516
Fairbanks, AK 99708

COVER: Jeanette Van Bueren negotiates a curve on the Jeff Studdert Race Track in Fairbanks, Alaska, during a heat of the 1988 Kobuk Limited North American Championships. Jeanette uses necklines with her fan-style hitch for greater control of her three-dog skijoring team. Photo by Polly Walter.

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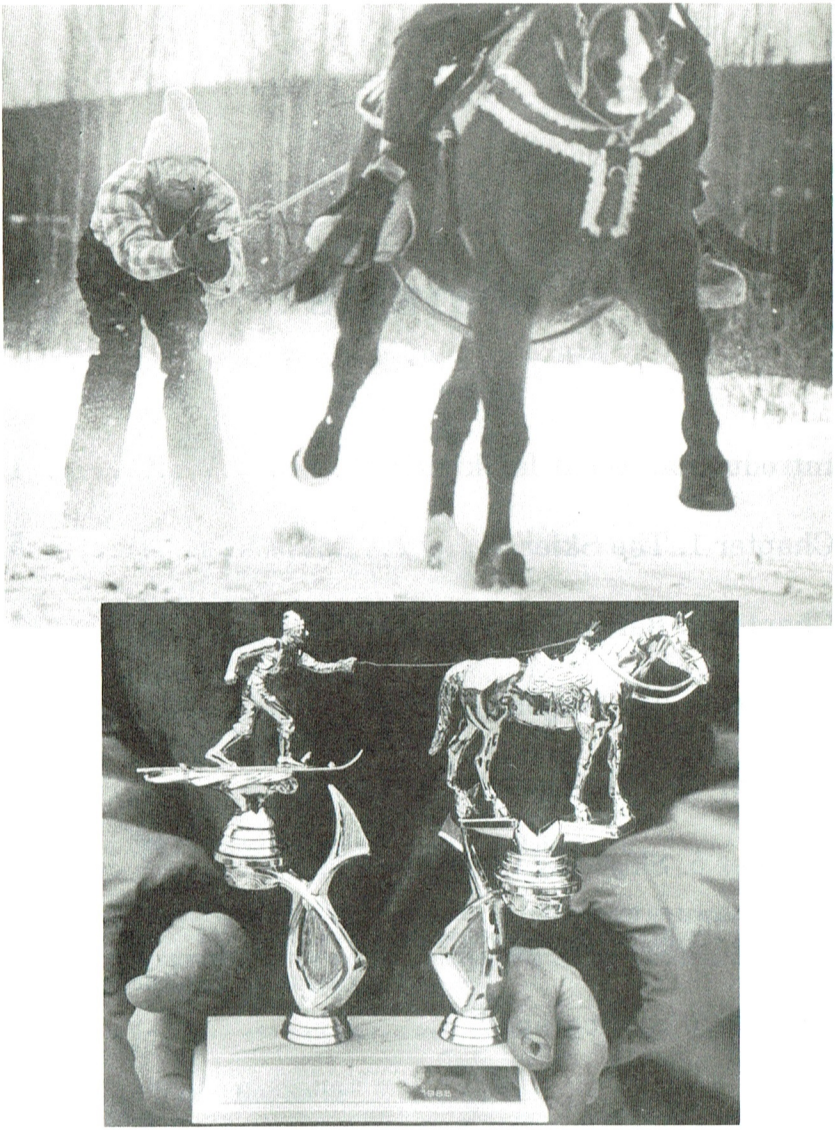


A skijorer of a different sort crouches as he heads into the finishing stretch behind a galloping horse. Skijoring behind horses recently resurfaced in the Fairbanks area, leading to organized races in 1987 and 1988. Photos by Mike Belrose.

INTRODUCTION

What is Skijoring?

Though we don't really know where it originated, skijoring with dogs probably dates back to the gold rush days, when the lure of yellow metal reached across the ocean to the Scandinavian countries. When those early explorers and gold miners returned from the Arctic, they brought dog mushing back to Scandinavia with them. There, where skiing originated, it was only natural for dog mushing and skiing to be combined. Skijoring behind dogs became immensely popular.

In the United States, skijoring was more commonly done behind horses. But as the automobile replaced the horse, skijoring gradually died out in mainstream America. Now you can't even find the word in most American encyclopedias and dictionaries. The native people of the Arctic, however, have been skijoring with dogs for years.

In Scandinavia, skijoring is considered to be a mere training technique for a unique combination of skijoring and traditional dog mushing called Nordic-style mushing. In Nordic-style mushing, the dog pulls a pulk (a small sled) and the driver skis behind the sled. Competitions in Nordic-style dog mushing have been held in Norway since 1932. The sport caught on in Scandinavia and gradually spread to central Europe. But until the 1980s, skijoring in the United States was just the pastime of a few creative skiers and dog mushers. Competitive events were few.

Suddenly, in 1986 and 1987, skijoring in interior Alaska began to catch on like wildfire. Races sprang up, the Alaska Skijoring and Pulk Association was formed, and attendance at skijoring clinics tripled. With the increased popularity of skiing and dog mushing all across the United States, this trend is likely to spread to the Lower 48.

So what exactly is this sport? In skijoring, the skier is pulled behind a dog or dogs in harness. A line about seven feet long connects skier to dog. In the best configuration, the line attaches to a special skijoring belt, although some skijorers simply hold the line in their hands. Usually no more than three dogs are used, and many skiers use just

one or two dogs. Cross country skis, rather than downhill skis, are normally used so that the skier can help the dog by gliding or skating.

Nordic-style dog mushing is very similar to skijoring, but with the addition of a small sled called a pulk. The pulk is built low and narrow so that it will remain stable and glide well on narrow trails. During races in Norway, the dog or dogs carry a specific amount of weight in the pulk — usually about 40 pounds per dog — so that one dog pulling 40 pounds has a fighting chance against two- or three-dog teams pulling 80 or 120 pounds. On longer races or during recreational tours, the pulk carries winter camping gear.

While there have been few pulk races in Alaska, more and more skiers have discovered the pleasure of winter camping with a pulk. Instead of packing the gear into a heavy backpack, most of it goes into the pulk. Pulks are designed to be pulled by either a dog or a skier, and there are even special pulks for pulling children or the handicapped.

A single dog can pull a skier over surprisingly long distances, depending on the type of dog and the skier's ability. Skijoring sprint races in Fairbanks usually run from 3 to 4 miles, but on a skijoring tour, even just one dog can pull a good skier for up to 30 miles a day.

Most dogs have a natural instinct to pull, which means the family pet is almost as likely to take to the sport as a racing sled dog.

Three competitors sprint for the finish line in a Nordic-style dog mushing event held in Norway. The racers are using bow-shaft hitches and competition-style pulks with fiberglass covers. Photo by Turrid Ness.

Skijoring dogs can weigh anywhere from 30 pounds to more than 100 pounds, and all types of breeds — from Labrador retrievers to Irish wolfhounds — have been used by skijorers. As in obedience and field work, the primary requirement is a close relationship between dog and owner.

Why are people attracted to skijoring? For many, there is the satisfaction and pleasure of working closely with their dogs, without a big financial commitment. Maintaining a kennel for Alaskan-style dog mushing can be an expensive proposition. The cost of dog food and veterinary bills for a number of dogs, plus a dogsled, lines and several harnesses, quickly adds up. Skijoring requires as little as a pair of skis, a harness, a belt, and a line for a single dog.

Skijoring is also exciting. Skijorers can reach speeds of 15 to 20 miles per hour, even with just one dog. Using a dog, a skier can cover much greater distances with ease. For downhill skiers who think cross country skiing is too much work, being pulled by a dog is like having your own miniature rope tow. (An important difference: You can't train a rope tow to wait for you if you fall.)

Other attractions are the pleasure of seeing your dog begin to dance in excitement whenever he sees his harness, and the exhilarating power and speed as your dog pulls you over the snow. Skijoring is not difficult to learn; some cross country skiing ability is necessary, of course, but you do not need to be an expert skier to enjoy the sport. Nor does the dog have to be in top condition, as long as its owner knows the dog's limits and abilities. Skijoring helps skiers to develop balance, and it is wonderful, fun exercise for the dog.

Although skijoring is fairly easy to learn, it requires some basic skills and attitudes on the part of the skier. Teaching your dog to pull can be a rewarding endeavor as long as a few simple steps are taken to minimize the frustrations. Knowing the right harness-training techniques and feeling confident about your own ability to ski are essential to provide a good experience for both the skier and the dog.

A competitive skijorer assumes a tuck position to lower his wind resistance and increase his speed as he heads down the trail. His three-dog team is hooked up in a tandem-style hitch. Photo by Polly Walter.

CHAPTER 1

The Skier

The first requirement for a new skijorer is the ability to ski. If you are an experienced skier, you are all set to add the second requirement: a dog that pulls. If you are new to skiing, however, you will need to develop some basic skills. A few structured lessons from an experienced ski instructor can be invaluable. Learning to ski the right way will make the sport of skiing, as well as the sport of skijoring, a great deal more pleasurable. Nordic (cross country) ski clubs sometimes offer short clinics in basic skiing techniques. Ski shops will usually be able to provide the names and addresses of ski clubs or instructors in your area.

The first and most important skiing skill is balance. Balance is the ability to feel at ease on your skis: to handle bumps, turns and slopes comfortably, and to meet changes in the trail or terrain with confidence. One way to develop balance is simply to ski. Skiing on all types of terrain — level, downhill, uphill, bumpy, smooth, groomed trail, ungroomed trail, soft snow, ice — will help you to develop a sense of balance and will prepare you for the occasional surprises you'll experience when skijoring.

As part of developing balance, you'll need to learn how to fall. It may seem like a backward way to learn to ski, but falling correctly is an essential skill. Even the best skiers occasionally take a spill. Skijoring is even more conducive to a fall now and then, and knowing how to fall reduces your chances of injury.

There's no substitute for actual experience, and one way to learn is to fall on purpose. Start at a standstill, if need be. If falling from the standing position will make you feel unbearably foolish, do it when no one is looking. Practice falling easily, without tensing up. Be careful not to put your arms out rigidly to break your fall. It may seem contrary to instinct, but taking a fall in a tuck position, with your shoulder or side taking the brunt of the impact, is much safer. An outstretched arm can twist or even break from the impact, unless you allow your arm to give way gently with the force.

Avoid falling directly forward or backward. If you fall forward, you risk being bruised by the tips of your skis, or when skijoring, being dragged forward on your face. If you fall backward, you may injure your tailbone or otherwise bruise or jar your back. It is best to fall sideways if at all possible.

When falling is inevitable, don't fight it. This doesn't mean you should let yourself fall if you could maneuver to keep your balance, but if there is no hope of recovery, a relaxed fall is less likely to hurt. Also, if you realize a split second ahead of time that you're about to take a dive, you can swing your weight sideways and control the fall.

You should also know how to slow down, stop, turn, and reverse direction. It's a good idea to take a few lessons and practice until you feel you've sufficiently mastered these skills. There are also numerous books in the library on cross country skiing. You do not have to be an expert skier to learn skijoring, but you should feel confident on skis.

CHAPTER 2

Before You Add the Dog . . .

In any sport, it is important that the athletes involved do not hurt the sport's image or violate the rules; this applies to skijoring, too. However, skijorers and mushers are different from most other athletes in that they work with dogs. People with dogs are hard to ignore. Dogs can be noisy, and they can run around and irritate people. Many people don't like dogs or are afraid of them. Dog teams take up lots of space on trails, and skiers or hikers usually have to get off the trail when a team passes. So whether you are dog mushing or skijoring, it is important to maintain a positive image with the general public. This begins with caring for your dog and driving with courtesy under all kinds of conditions.

Some common-sense rules to follow.

- Keep your dogs tied up. It's the law in many communities, and it's a courtesy to neighbors anywhere. Responsible dog ownership should be a universal habit. The more you work with dogs, the more you will see how important it is.
- Train very carefully at home, and don't discipline your dog in front of an audience. Humane and fair discipline can still be misconstrued by an uninformed onlooker.
- Don't hit your dog, either when training or when racing. Aside from being harmful to the image of skijoring, hitting your dog is not productive.
- Never yell or scream at dogs — your own or anyone else's. Again, it's not good for the sport's image, and it's not necessary. Dogs have acute hearing, and the tone of your voice will impress them far more than its volume.
- Always maintain full control of your dogs. If you can't handle two dogs when skijoring, don't take two out. Stick to one dog until your ability improves.
- At races, keep your dogs at your own vehicle. Don't let them wander around loose. Also, don't take a dog on a leash to watch the start of a race. Your dog will be an

unwelcome distraction to the competing dogs and drivers.

- Whether training or racing, always be courteous to other drivers on the trail.
- When you're out training with your dog, if people try to complain to you about loose dogs or barking, be polite and avoid a confrontation. Save discussion for later; it's important that the dog not be distressed during training.

Mari Hoe-Raitto and Lupus illustrate the principle of control as they demonstrate the configuration for Nordic-style dog mushing. Photo by Polly Walter.

A wide variety of sizes and breeds of dogs can used for skijoring. When choosing the right dog for you, keep in mind your own size and your skiing ability. From left to right, these three skijoring dogs are: Muskeg, a 130-pound malamute/collie/shepherd mix; Sam, a 40-pound purebred springer spaniel; and Lady Shawna Marie, a 55-pound purebred golden retriever. Photo by Polly Walter.

CHAPTER 3

The Skijoring Dog

Any dog that weighs more than about 30 pounds is probably capable of pulling a person on skis. The trick is to translate capable into willing. Most dogs, if harness-trained properly, are happy to have the chance to run and to pull. It beats having to walk decorously on a leash next to the owner! But the dog's experience needs to be positive. Training requires patience, and it helps if you enjoy working with animals. (A word of note: Sometimes a person's favorite pet simply refuses to pull. Not every dog is cut out for skijoring.)

If you are going to buy a dog for skijoring, think carefully before you make a purchase. Even if you plan to find a dog at the animal shelter, it will help if you have a good idea of what you want in your

dog. Are you going to compete in skijoring races? Are you also going to use the dog for hunting? Do you plan to take long trips? Will your dog be expected to carry a dog pack? Do you weigh 90 pounds or do you weigh 190 pounds? Do you ski hard or do you prefer to relax and let the dog do most of the work?

You may find it helpful to go to skijoring and mushing events. It is a rare dog driver who isn't willing to talk about dogs. Dog shows are a great way to see many different sizes and types of breeds. Find a type of dog that you like to be with. For skijoring and Nordic-style mushing, look for dogs that weigh between 40 and 70 pounds.

If you are seeking a dog for competition, you might consider a purebred hunting dog (the German short-haired pointer is used a great deal in Norway), a Siberian husky, or an Alaskan sled dog (usually a husky mix, but sled dogs come in all shapes, sizes and combinations of breeds). Labrador and golden retrievers, German shepherds, Doberman pinschers, and Alaskan malamutes are also good possibilities. Male or female? Males are usually larger, can be hardheaded but also more aggressive. Females are often easier to teach and may be better for beginners.

Keep in mind that much of dog behavior is genetically determined, and that different breeds have been developed to favor different traits. For example, a retriever will usually begin bringing back balls and sticks without any need for coaxing from his owner. The instinct to retrieve has been strengthened and enhanced by selective breeding for that particular ability. It may take some extra patience and care to persuade a retriever to pull in harness, although many retrievers become excellent skijoring dogs once they understand what is expected of them.

Conversely, the Alaskan husky has been specifically bred to develop the pulling instinct. Young husky pups often pull obsessively the very first time they are put in harness, with little or no advance training. However, teaching a husky to retrieve a ball can be a formidable proposition. Obedience work can also be more difficult for a husky to comprehend, because less attention has been placed on developing those traits necessary for performance in this area.

You may want to save yourself the effort of training a dog by purchasing a good harness-trained dog from a dog musher's kennel or a fellow skijorer. However, exercise a little caution around dog mushers who claim their dogs would make great skijoring dogs, particularly those dog mushers who've never skijored. Team dogs (dogs that run in the middle of a dog mushing team, rather than in lead) will sometimes refuse to run alone or out front. Even a lead dog may balk at the strange sound and feel of a skier behind it. If possible, take the dog on a trial run or make arrangements with the seller to return the dog if it doesn't work out. Most reputable dog mushers will take a dog back if the customer isn't happy with its performance.

The typical skijoring harness has an X-style back and is well-padded across the shoulders and chest. This type of harness is commonly used for sprint and long-distance dog mushing as well as skijoring. Photo by Polly Walter.

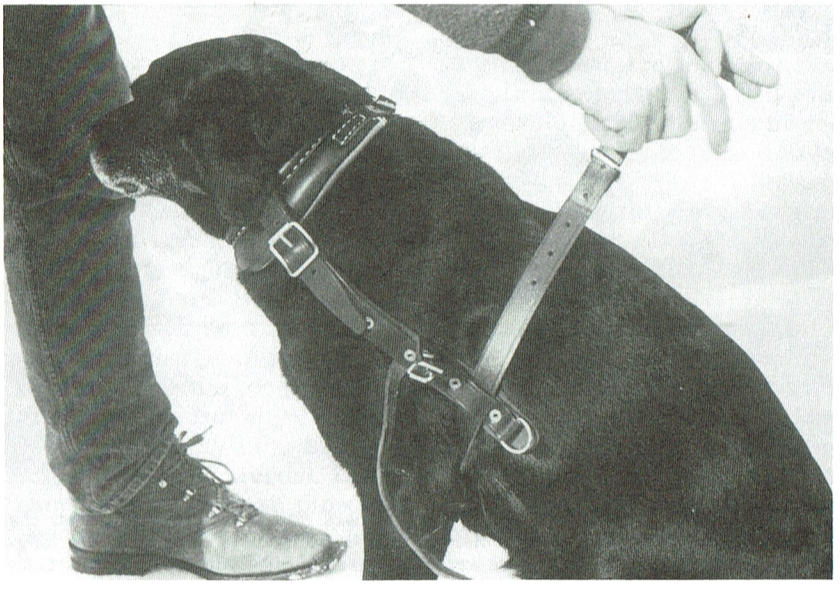
CHAPTER 4

Training

Dog training is the subject of numerous books and articles. It can also be a hot topic between trainers who subscribe to differing methods. The basic principles of training are as pertinent to skijoring as they are to obedience or field work. If you have never trained a dog, taking a dog-obedience class may give you the tools and knowledge you need to work effectively with your dog. Many excellent books are available, including several on training sled dogs. The bibliography at the end of this booklet will help if you're new to the world of dogs and dog training.

When you are ready to train the skijoring dog, your first step is to purchase a harness that fits properly. An ill-fitting harness can chafe the dog's skin and will not allow the best use of the dog's pulling muscles. If you're not sure how a harness should fit, ask an expert to advise you. Most stores that sell harnesses should have someone who can help you determine the right size and fit. Be sure the harness is a racing-type harness rather than a weight-pull harness.

Harness training can begin when the dog is quite young. (A makeshift harness is sufficient for puppy training, since the dog will



The traditional leather harness used in Norway offers well-padded support around the dog's neck for pulling. Photo by William A. Stortz.

outgrow whatever you use.) When a puppy is about three or four months old, you can begin to add very light weights for it to drag around. The timing for serious pulling and actual skijoring behind the dog should be based on the individual dog's weight, size and attitude, but usually isn't undertaken until the dog is at least six months of age. Any serious pulling should be done with a well-fitting harness, of course.

The harness will probably feel strange to the dog at first. You can help your dog feel more comfortable about that odd contraption on his back by putting the harness on him without making him pull anything for the first few times. Let him run outside or walk about the house with the harness on until he seems to be accustomed to the feel of it. DO NOT leave the dog unsupervised with the harness on. Many a harness has been chewed to pieces within a minute or two by an unsupervised dog.

The second step is to tie a light drag to the harness and let the dog pull the drag around behind him. A small tire, piece of wood, or any other object that slides easily will work. Don't start with too heavy an object or the dog may become discouraged. Walk and run with the dog, and encourage him with your voice. Pulling should be made to seem like fun, not work. Lots of praise and patience are the key. Gradually work your way back until the dog is pulling from in front of you, rather than from beside or behind you. You want him to lead, not follow. You also want him to run, not walk.

CHAPTER 5

Skijoring Commands

As the dog becomes accustomed to the harness and pulling, you can begin to teach him some basic commands. Training a dog for skijoring is similar to training a lead dog for mushing. Give a specific command when you want the dog to go forward. Mushers and skijorers often use "OK," "Let's go," or "Hike" to start their teams. (If you use "OK" as your command, be forewarned: You may find an innocent "OK" to a bystander lands you on your face if your dog decides you were talking to him.)

Other commands to teach your dog are "Gee" (go to the right), "Haw" (go to the left), and "Come around" (reverse direction). Some mushers refine the come-around command by teaching their leaders "Come gee" and "Come haw."

When you want the dog to stop, say "Whoa!" in a firm voice and immediately stop the dog. Mushers are not always firm in teaching their dogs to stop, but they have ice hooks and brakes on their sleds. Skijorers do not, so "Whoa" is a crucial command for them. Another command that is much more important for skijoring than for mushing is "Stand" or "Stay." Without a brake, you are dependent on your dog's ability to understand and obey these voice commands. There are few skijoring experiences more frustrating than trying to get up from a fall when your dog refuses to stay and keeps pulling you back off your feet.

Many mushers and skijorers teach their dogs the command "Easy." When you give this command, you should slow your dog down to a moderate pace — a slow trot, for example. This command comes in handy if you are in an uncertain situation such as coming up behind a team of dogs, taking a blind or sharp turn, starting down a steep hill or switching trails. It is helpful in conserving your dog's strength if you are going on a very long run. Another command, "Behind," can be used when going down a steep hill, so that the dog runs just behind you. This is helpful if you are skiing too fast for the dog to stay in front of you.

It is sometimes easier to teach a dog these commands when he is on a leash, rather than while skijoring. However, when you use a leash, don't train for more than 15 minutes at a time, once or twice a day. If you clearly show your dog what each command means, and enforce each command exactly, your dog will learn more quickly and retain the lesson much better. The particular words you use for each command don't matter as much as your consistency.

If you are having problems training your dog, you may want to ask an experienced skijorer for help or advice. Most trainers agree that it's easiest to teach a dog to pull by putting him next to a seasoned sled dog or skijoring dog. Most dogs like to chase, so if your dog seems reluctant to pull you, try skijoring behind another skijorer or musher.

Three skijorers and their Labrador retrievers travel a quiet country road in interior Alaska. Skijoring in a small group can be an effective training method for dogs who are new to pulling. Photo by William A. Stortz.

Above all, don't lose your patience or your temper. One local skijorer spent several days trying to coax his well-trained hunting dog to pull him on skis, with no success. Finally, he tied a small log to the dog's harness and skied along separately. Gradually, the dog came to realize that it was acceptable to pull against the weight, and even more importantly, that it was permissible to run ahead of his owner. The two of them went on to capture first place in the one-dog

class at the 1987 Tanana Valley Fair Association Skijoring Championships held in Fairbanks.

Once you and your dog have graduated to skijoring, there is one point that cannot be emphasized enough: You must be very careful never to fall on your dog or to strike your dog with your skis. If you fall on him or your skis frighten or hurt him, he may refuse to run in front of you. It is possible to permanently ruin a skijoring dog through carelessness. If you have to fall, fall away from the dog. Keep alert for changes in the dog's pace. You must be prepared to stop quickly if he does, in order to avoid running into him with your skis.

If you are going downhill, constantly monitor your speed so you don't overtake the dog. If you can't avoid catching up, steer to the side instead of clipping him with your ski tips. One pair of skiers taught their two dogs the command "Track!" Whenever those dogs hear "Track," they immediately jump to the side of the trail.

If you do make the mistake of frightening your dog, you may have lots of hard work in front of you before he will pull you again. Sometimes the damage is permanent, but there are some steps you can take that may help bring your dog around. Let your dog get used to skis again. Carry them around near the dog or put them down where he can sniff them. Reassure him constantly, particularly if he spooks at the sight or sound of skis. If you can do so safely, ski with your dog running loose near you. At all times, be careful to do nothing that will frighten him again.

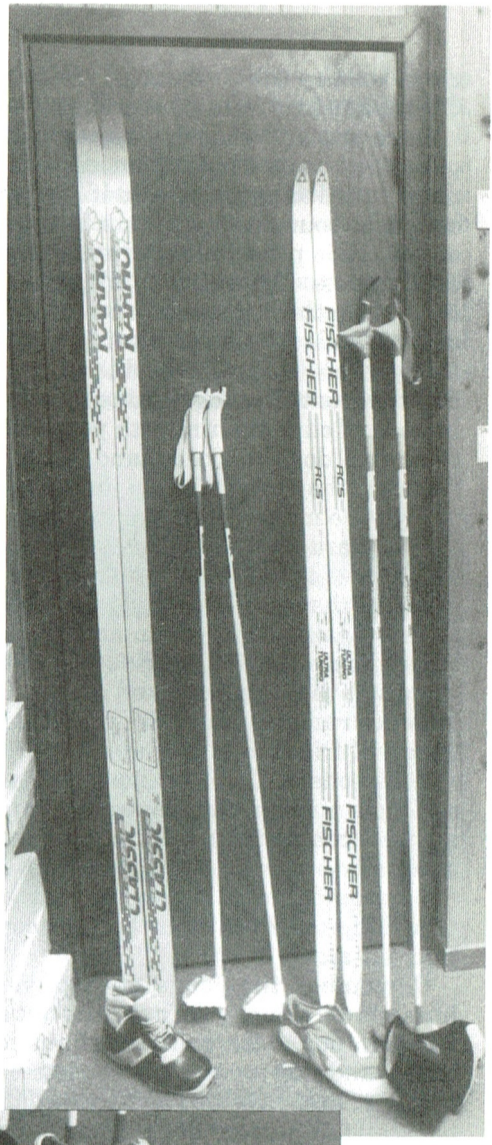
When one of Carol's skijoring dogs, Jackson, was frightened by a skijoring mishap, she coaxed him into chasing another skijorer, who would often turn and encourage the dog. Jackson's desire to run gradually overrode his fear of skis, and with constant reassurance and encouragement he began to run next to and even in front of the other skijorer. Eventually he grew confident enough for Carol to take him out alone.

Remember that dogs need physical conditioning as much as humans do. When you first start out skijoring, make sure you do not run your dog to the point of exhaustion. Watch carefully for signs of tiring, and stop to rest if your dog seems to need it. Work gradually up to longer distances and faster speeds. Keep an eye on the condition of the trail and on your dog's general condition. Ice balls, split pads and cramped muscles are all hindrances to a dog's enjoyment of skijoring. Avoid skijoring (or any other training, for that matter) on days when you feel grumpy or impatient. Your dog won't enjoy the training, and neither will you. If skijoring is a pleasure for your dog, he will pull harder, faster and longer.

SKIS: Several different types of skis, poles and boots may be used for skijoring. Of the two types shown here, the skis on the left are traditional diagonal-stride skis. The tips should reach approximately to the wrist of the skier's arm when it is extended directly upward. These skis are 200 centimeters long. (For reference, the door in the photo is 6 feet, 8 inches, and the two ski/pole packages are for a person approximately 5 feet, 8 inches tall.) The ski poles should fit snugly under the armpit of the skier and are used mainly for balance.

The skis on the right are designed for skating. Skating skis are typically 10 centimeters shorter than skis used for diagonal striding; the pair shown here are 190 centimeters long. Poles used for skating are longer for control and double-poling on the trail. These poles typically come to the middle of the shoulder. Stronger skiers can use poles that reach the top of the shoulders.

BOOTS: The boot shown on the left is a light touring boot, and the boots on the right are designed for skating and speed. The ski-boot coveralls shown at front right are made of a neoprene base. They cover the ski boot, keeping the foot several degrees warmer. Photos by Polly Walter, and special thanks to Beaver Sports of Fairbanks for the use of their ski equipment.



CHAPTER 6

Equipment

Naturally, the most important equipment is a pair of skis, boots and poles. Most skijorers already own a pair of skis when they begin skijoring, and as mentioned earlier, skijorers commonly use cross country skis. However, almost any type of ski will do. If you plan to purchase skis, your choice of ski package will be determined in part by the kind of skiing and skijoring you plan to do.

If you skijor in the back country or on ungroomed trails, you may be most comfortable using the wider touring, telemark or metal-edged skis. Adjustable bindings that allow you to lock down the boot heel may be desirable for steep downhill work or for skijoring with more than three dogs. (A three-dog skijoring team is usually more than sufficient for speed and power, but some people don't know when to stop.)

For groomed trails and racing, regular cross country skis are usually sufficient. Competitive skijorers often use shorter skating skis, which work best on well-groomed trails. If you're not sure which type of ski is best for you, talk to members of your local ski club, fellow skijorers and ski shop personnel. It's important to find a ski you are comfortable with.

Ski poles can be unforgiving under the stress of skijoring, so it's a good idea to purchase sturdy, flexible poles. Avoid wooden poles; they are usually not sturdy enough for the rigors of skijoring. Aluminum poles are favored by many skijorers because of their strength and flexibility. Top racers sometimes prefer carbon fiber poles, but they are usually more likely to break if you fall on them. They also tend to be more expensive than aluminum.

The type of boot you use is determined by the type of ski and skiing technique (skating versus diagonal striding) you prefer, but whatever type you choose, make sure the boot fits well and is comfortable. If your feet get cold easily, choose a more heavily insulated boot. If you have weak ankles, you may want to find a boot with stronger ankle support. Ski shop personnel are usually helpful in finding the right skis and boots for your needs.

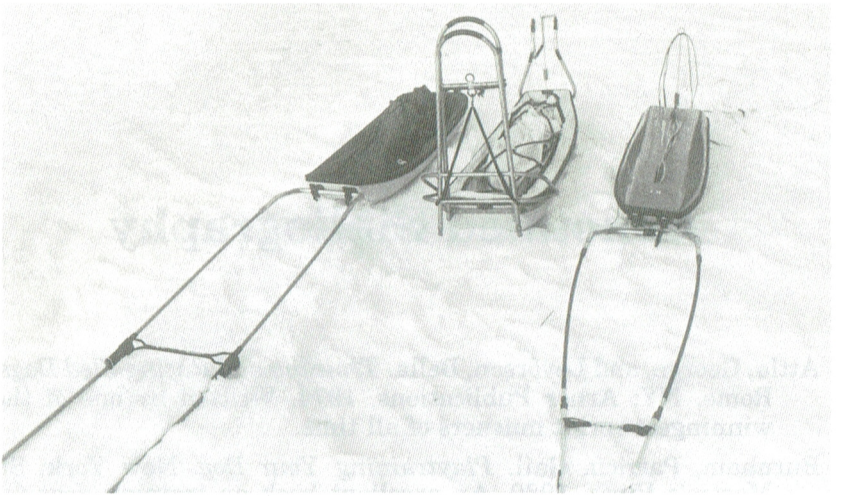
An optional item, but one that may keep your feet from freezing, is a pair of ski boot coveralls. These insulated covers slip over your ski boots and tuck into your ski bindings. Be sure that you purchase the type of coveralls designed for your particular binding system. The coveralls will keep your feet warmer in the wind chill generated from skijoring and will allow you to ski in comfort at temperatures as much as 15 degrees colder than with just ski boots. Remember that your feet usually will not be as active when skijoring and they will tend to feel the cold more quickly.

Once you have your skis, you'll need a skijoring belt, a line, and a harness for the dog. The harness, as said before, should fit well and should not hamper free movement of the dog's legs. The skijoring belt should be wide across your back. It should cover at least three vertebrae or be at least four inches high, and it should fit low on the waist. A weight-lifting or backpack belt will work. Belts designed specifically for skijoring can sometimes be purchased from local feed stores, mushing outfitters, or custom sewing shops. If you have trouble finding the proper equipment, a list of suppliers can be obtained by writing to the authors at the address listed in the back of this booklet.

Do NOT use a non-releasable clip to attach the skijoring line to the belt. There will be times when you do not want to be inextricably bound to your dog. Some examples are dogfights, falling through the ice on a river, or tumbling down an extremely steep slope. The best arrangement is an open hook or quick-release (a sort of snap that releases with a quick jerk) on the belt so that the skijoring line can be slipped on and off with ease. Also, if you are going downhill, it is wise to unclip the line from the belt and hold it in your hand. That way, you can hold the line behind you if you overtake your dog, and you can release the dog quickly if you or your dog take an uncontrollable fall.

The best skijoring line for both you and your dog is one that incorporates a bungee, or shock cord, into the design. The shock cord absorbs some of the stress from starting out quickly or stopping abruptly, and will take the strain off both your back and your dog's back. When you double-pole behind the dog, the shock cord will make the process smoother for you and will make it easier for the dog to maintain his running rhythm. The line should be approximately six to seven feet long. A too-long line lessens your control over the dog; a too-short line increases the danger of clipping the dog with your skis. Skijoring lines are available at feed stores or through mail-order, or you can make your own with polyethylene (hollow-braid) rope and a short length of winter-weight shock cord.

For those who wish to dabble in Nordic-style dog mushing or who enjoy overnight skijoring treks, another optional piece of equipment is a pulk, or small sled. The pulk is drawn by the dog, and the person skis behind the pulk, attached to it by a skijoring-type line. A



Pulks come in several different sizes and types. In this photograph, the pulk on the left is set up to be pulled by a person. The shank is much longer than that used with a dog. By simply changing the shank, the pulk can be pulled by one or two dogs. Several pounds of gear may be carried in a pulk. An average-sized dog can pull approximately 50 pounds.

The pulk in the middle is designed for use with three or more dogs and for carrying gear. A brake is attached on the back for safety when slowing down a larger number of dogs.

The pulk on the right is used for competition. The shank of this pulk is set up for a dog. A competition pulk is lighter and more streamlined than one used for recreational camping. Photo by Polly Walter.

participant at a skijoring clinic proposed an interesting variation to this setup. He suggested having the dog pull the person, and the person pull the pulk. This arrangement, using rigid shafts to attach the pulk to the skier, might be particularly good for taking along children. The skijorer is then assured that the child is safely behind him, rather than between him and the dog. Pulks are designed to be pulled by either a dog or a skier, so both of these configurations are possible.

Pulks come in a wide range of sizes, from sleek racing styles to large freight or passenger types. For recreational uses, the pulk can be loaded with camping or picnic gear. Pulks are also made to carry children or the handicapped, and are sometimes used in Norway for rescue work. A complete catalog is available by writing to the authors, and some feed stores or dog mushing outfitters carry pulks. A pulk is a marvelous addition to a winter camping trip with dogs.

Authors' note: We hope this booklet serves as a good start for beginning skijorers. If you have questions, comments or suggestions, please feel free to write us at P.O. Box 82516, Fairbanks, AK 99708. For more information on the Alaska Skijoring & Pulk Association, write to ASPA, P.O. Box 82516-B, Fairbanks, AK 99708.

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